



STAFFING AND OVERSIGHT REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Suzanne Kreie, Chair
Lisa Chapland, Co-Chair

“In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of public posting on the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect website: [DCF | New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect \(NJTF CAN\)](#).”
**Please note the meeting was recorded for the transcription of minutes.*

Meeting Minutes
May 12, 2026

Attendance

Suzanne Kreie, Coordinated Family Care
Lisa Chapland, Relative Resource Parent
Marygrace Billek, Public member
Clinton Page, Department of Children and Families
Mary Coogan, Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Lynette Rente, Office of the Public Defender
Linda Porcaro, Somerset County Office of Youth Services
Traci Telemaque, Office of the Public Defender
Elizabeth Sherwood, Division of Law
Mary Hallahan, Resource Parent

Guests

Emily Douglas, Montclair University
Svetlana Shpiegel, Montclair University
Wendy Zeitlin, Montclair University

Staff

Bethany D’Amelio, Department of Children and Families

1. Call to Order

The meeting was convened with the reading of the public notice.

2. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

The members reviewed minutes from the March 2026 and April 2026 meetings.

- The March 2026 meeting minutes were approved without opposition or edit. One abstention was noted.
- The April 2026 meeting minutes were approved by the members without opposition or edit. One abstention was noted.

3. Monthly Dashboard and Performance Review

The group reviewed the monthly dashboard, which was described as the primary tool for monitoring ongoing performance information and trend data. Members discussed dashboard tabs and indicators, including engagement and visitation.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on caseworker visits and the reasons some required visits may not occur. Members noted that missed visits may reflect more than one issue, including:

- documentation gaps
- participant unavailability
- the way information is entered into the case management system.

The group discussed whether additional coding or dropdown options in the system could improve the identification of reasons for missed visits. Members emphasized that more detailed data on why visits do not occur would support stronger recommendations in the next annual report.

The discussion also clarified that virtual contact does not count toward the in-person visit measure under review, even when staff remain in communication with families by telephone or text.

Members returned to the previously identified issue of engagement and noted that understanding why required contacts do not occur is important both for compliance and for evaluating the quality of engagement with children and families. The group expressed interest in receiving more granular data if available.

4. 2025 Report data

A. Discussion of Investigative Findings and Decision-Making Trends

The group reviewed data on investigative findings, including substantiated, established, and not established outcomes. Members noted that substantiated or established findings

were reported at approximately 2 percent and that the state has maintained a relatively low substantiation rate in recent years.

Participants discussed several possible factors influencing these trends, including:

- legal developments
- evidentiary standards
- practice culture
- worker decision-making

Members expressed concern that court decisions and legal challenges may have narrowed the practical application of abuse and neglect definitions, affecting how staff assess and classify cases. Participants observed that when workers are aware of cases in which findings are overturned, those outcomes may influence future case practice and affect the threshold workers believe is necessary to support a finding.

Several participants stressed that these ripple effects may not be fully captured in available data but may still significantly influence system behavior.

The group also discussed cases involving repeated allegations or prior referrals before a case was formally opened. Members emphasized the importance of understanding how often children and families come to agency attention before more formal intervention occurs. Concern was expressed that some cases may reflect missed opportunities for earlier assistance or prevention-oriented support. Participants noted that this issue had also emerged in complaint review and oversight work, where patterns over time suggested that intervention opportunities may not always have been acted upon soon enough.

B. Reasons for Child Welfare Involvement

The meeting included discussion of the primary reasons families become involved with the child welfare system. The data reviewed indicated that neglect remains the primary driver of involvement, accounting for roughly two-thirds of cases discussed during the presentation.

Members also noted:

- a modest increase in physical abuse over the reviewed period; and
- a decline in sexual abuse trends, which participants stated appeared consistent with broader long-term trends.

This discussion led to broader consideration of the difference between family poverty and neglect, and the risk that families may enter the system because of unmet needs rather than willful maltreatment. Participants emphasized the need for stronger community-based alternatives and better front-end support so that families can access help before situations escalate into formal child welfare involvement.

C. Prevention, Mandated Reporting, and Community Response

Members discussed the importance of having effective community pathways available before a report to child protection is made. Schools were identified as a common setting in which concerns first emerge, especially when children present with unmet basic needs or when families appear to need support.

Participants emphasized that first responders and mandated reporters need practical alternatives they trust. Members observed that when referral sources do not believe community supports will respond effectively, they may default to making child welfare reports because those reports are perceived as the most likely way to prompt immediate action.

The group referenced ongoing work related to training and systems change, including efforts to support staff and external partners in considering response pathways more carefully and addressing disparities in decision-making.

There was also discussion of advancing legislation related to mandated reporter issues that had been raised at a prior task force meeting. Members agreed that these developments should continue to be monitored because they may affect how families enter the system and how concerns are triaged.

D. Oversight Concerns and Complaints Review

Participants revisited concerns previously raised through complaints and advocacy channels. The discussion reflected ongoing concern about cases in which repeated allegations over time may not have resulted in earlier intervention, followed later by more serious system involvement.

Members expressed appreciation for the department's willingness to take these concerns seriously and for beginning a more focused review through the newer task force structure. At the same time, participants emphasized that sustained attention will be necessary and that improvements will require continued effort over time.

There was a shared view that complaint review can reveal valuable patterns for oversight, particularly where recurring fact patterns suggest the need for:

- stronger screening
- earlier service connection
- changes in practice guidance

The overall tone of the discussion reflected both urgency and a commitment to continued collaboration.

5. Legislative Feedback and Annual Report Timing

In the latter part of the meeting, the group discussed feedback received during legislative sessions, including comments made in both Senate and Assembly settings. Participants reported that legislators value the annual report, are awaiting its release, and recognize the importance of the group's work. Members described this as important affirmation of the report's usefulness and its role in supporting public accountability.

The group also discussed confusion that can arise around report naming and timing. Members noted that, in 2026, the group is discussing a report based on earlier-year data and that the title should make the data year immediately clear to readers. It was stated that the report currently in process would be titled the 2024 Performance Report. Members also considered whether future reports should include clearer notation, such as "data year" language beneath the main title.

Another major topic was the timing of report release. Members explained that the report content may be complete before graphic design is finalized, raising the question of whether a PDF or non-designed version could be circulated sooner. It was clarified that the report was substantively complete, though not yet in final designed format.

Participants stated that greater clarity is needed concerning:

- the expected release point
- whether the deliverable must wait for graphic design
- whether a completed PDF may be shared earlier

Members also noted that adequate time must be built in for review, comment, and voting before final release.

The group agreed that follow-up with the department would be needed on unresolved questions concerning report timing and release expectations. It was also noted that staff are working backward from the deadline to improve the timeline for the next reporting cycle and to make future reports available sooner.

This memo aims to maintain transparency and provide the public with an overview of the task force's recent deliberations. The committee values community input and engagement as we collectively strive to enhance the welfare of children and families across New Jersey. This meeting report was prepared, in part, with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

For further information or queries, the public can reach out via the contact channels provided by the Department of Children and Families.